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SUBJECT: POLAND - MISSILE DEFENSE: FINDING A WAY FORWARD?

REF: WARSAW 597

Classified By: Ambassador Victor Ashe, by reasons 1.4(b,d)

1. (C-NF) After a lengthy hiatus, there are high expectations in Warsaw that Ballistic Missile Defense Agreement (BMDA) negotiations will resume soon. As irritating as the pause has been, Polish positions on defense modernization have softened in the interim, and we may actually be better positioned to reach agreement than we were six months ago. Suggestions that we might look elsewhere have had an effect, but more productive are the successive meetings of the Security Cooperation Consultative Group (SCCG), which are methodically grounding Polish expectations in reality. GOP public rhetoric has shifted as well -- loose GOP talk of expensive air defense systems has been replaced by candid admissions that responsibility for modernizing Poland's military lies first and foremost with Poland.

2. (C-NF) There are signs that PM Tusk and FM Sikorski may be positioning themselves to say "yes" in the next two months. Sikorski's planned trip to the U.S. appears to be part of a GOP endgame that Tusk and Sikorski have been preparing over the past few weeks. Failure would obviously be costly to Sikorski -- the Warsaw chattering class is unanimous that he cannot survive a second drumming on MD. That may make Sikorski hungry to close (if he is gauging the situation correctly, which is not certain). The public-opinion-minded Tusk, however, has remained aloof and will not have so much to lose. To hit the public's sweet spot on BMD, Tusk will need to be able to assert that Poland is "safer" on balance and that HE secured the best deal for Poland. In concrete terms, this means reaching consensus on the new threats BMD may bring to Poland; a stated U.S. willingness to work with the Poles to address those threats; and, symbolically significant U.S. undertakings, such as a High-Level Defense Group (HLDG), or systems that will further enhance the already strong strategic relationship with the United States and thereby Polish national security.

3. (C-NF) The SCCG process is paying off, and has been a good first step towards building a longer-term enhanced strategic relationship. The May 7 SCCG inauguration of four working groups (modernization, intelligence, trade and finance) was received very positively by the Polish side. This past week, the Intelligence working group was able to reach a consensus on the threats facing Poland, including from BMD. In a conversation with the DCM May 30, MOD U/S Komorowski agreed that the Intel WG has essentially put to rest the notion that the USG is out of sync with Polish security concerns.

¶4. (C-NF) Having an agreed threat assessment will ease somewhat the efforts of the modernization WG, next set to meet June 18-19 in Stuttgart. DCM reminded Komorowski that Poland's challenge in the next round of modernization talks is to abandon a one-for-one system replacement approach and to instead work with the U.S. to develop a plan for building a cost-effective modern defense force in Poland. MFA Americas Director Andrzej Jaroszynski told DCM May 19 that the WG process provided a "middle ground between the rather extreme opening positions of both Poland and the U.S." We hope that proves true in Stuttgart. The goal of all four WGs is to deliver final reports to the SCCG by July 15, with the RAND Corporation preparing in tandem an independent report on Poland's defense capabilities and requirements. One way to meet the Poles' desire for an enhanced security relationship is to announce in July that SCCG discussions will continue under the auspices of a new Polish-American (HLDG), similar to the U.S.-Turkey HLDG. This would provide a stable vehicle for channeling longer term Polish military aspirations, and could also help the SOFA negotiations.

¶5. (C-NF) So are the Poles still just looking for "bling?" Yes, but maybe not to the tune of 20-plus billion dollars. The lead Polish negotiator, MFA U/S Waszczykowski, told Ambassador Mull May 7 that Tusk and Sikorski were pleased by the President's request for an additional \$20 million in FMF

for FY09, which they see as a good faith gesture. We should not let DefMin Klich's incoherent outbursts confuse us: Tusk, Sikorski and even Klich have significantly backed down in public from Poland's original demands for extensive financial and material assistance. We hear privately they will settle for less assistance if they can show that by taking on MD they have gained stature within NATO and secured evidence of U.S. planning to defend Poland and the MD installation. Waszczykowski has suggested less expensive ways to help the GOP to "yes," noting that the lack of explicit "contingency planning" for defense of the site is a problem: "The more you share your operational planning with us and demonstrate your intention to defend the MD site, the less we will require in terms of material aid"

¶6. (C-NF) But if we reach a deal, can the Tusk government get BMDA through the Sejm? We believe that parliamentary ratification here will not likely be the uphill battle facing the Czech government, although Tusk will undoubtedly need to give President Kaczynski some ownership/role in the final agreement to secure the votes of his party. Public support is shifting subtly. Opposition to MD has held steady at just over 50 percent for sometime now, while support for MD is rising slowly and has consistently polled above 30 percent since the beginning of this year. More encouraging is new polling that links MD with enhanced U.S. security guarantees, which shows half the population in favor of "MD plus." This is the sweet spot at which Tusk must aim. And we need to keep in mind that Tusk has yet to lend any of his immense popularity to the MD cause--we assume he would work to sell any agreement he signed.

¶7. (C-NF) But will the Poles be good partners going forward? After all, SOFA agreements, foreign defense installations and strategic links to the U.S. are hardly for the faint of heart. No doubt the constant stream of demands emanating from Warsaw must leave Washington policy makers wondering whether Poland really wants MD at all. In the end, however, Poland has been a strong and faithful ally in many of our most difficult endeavors over the past two decades, and still sees the U.S. as its primary security partner. Arguably no ally on the European continent has done more for us in Iraq and Afghanistan. Poland has also "punched above its weight" in Bosnia, Kosovo, Lebanon and now Chad. The convergence of Polish and U.S. world views means that the GOP often carries U.S. water and is sometimes out ahead of us within the EU on crucial policy issues such as relations with Russia, Georgia, Ukraine and Belarus, Cuba democratization, energy security, and non-proliferation concerns from China to Iran to North Korea.

18. (C-NF) While MD is driving events right now, this is also an ideal moment to vest ourselves more deeply in Poland,s future strategic direction. As former Ambassador Jerzy Kozminski puts it, the U.S. is losing out in Poland at a mind-numbingly fast pace to the European Union, whose well-advertised EUR 10 billion (USD 16 billion) annual injection of structural funds into Poland far exceeds anything we might muster. But with the Poles, it is not all about money. In his May 7 annual address to parliament, Sikorski may have led with the need to maintain EU solidarity and assure NATO's continued relevance, but he went on to stress that Poland,s most important security relationship was its "strategic partnership with the United States...which exceeds political dialogue and military cooperation." Poland,s near instinctive alignment with the U.S. across a whole range of issues comes at an ever-increasing cost. (EU diplomats tell us that the other member states actually caucus to coordinate their approaches to Poland - a unique situation.) Agreement on MD is still achievable despite the short timeline and, when combined with an on-going defense modernization dialogue like the HLDG, would anchor Poland to the United States and the United States to this part of Europe for the foreseeable future.

ASHE